

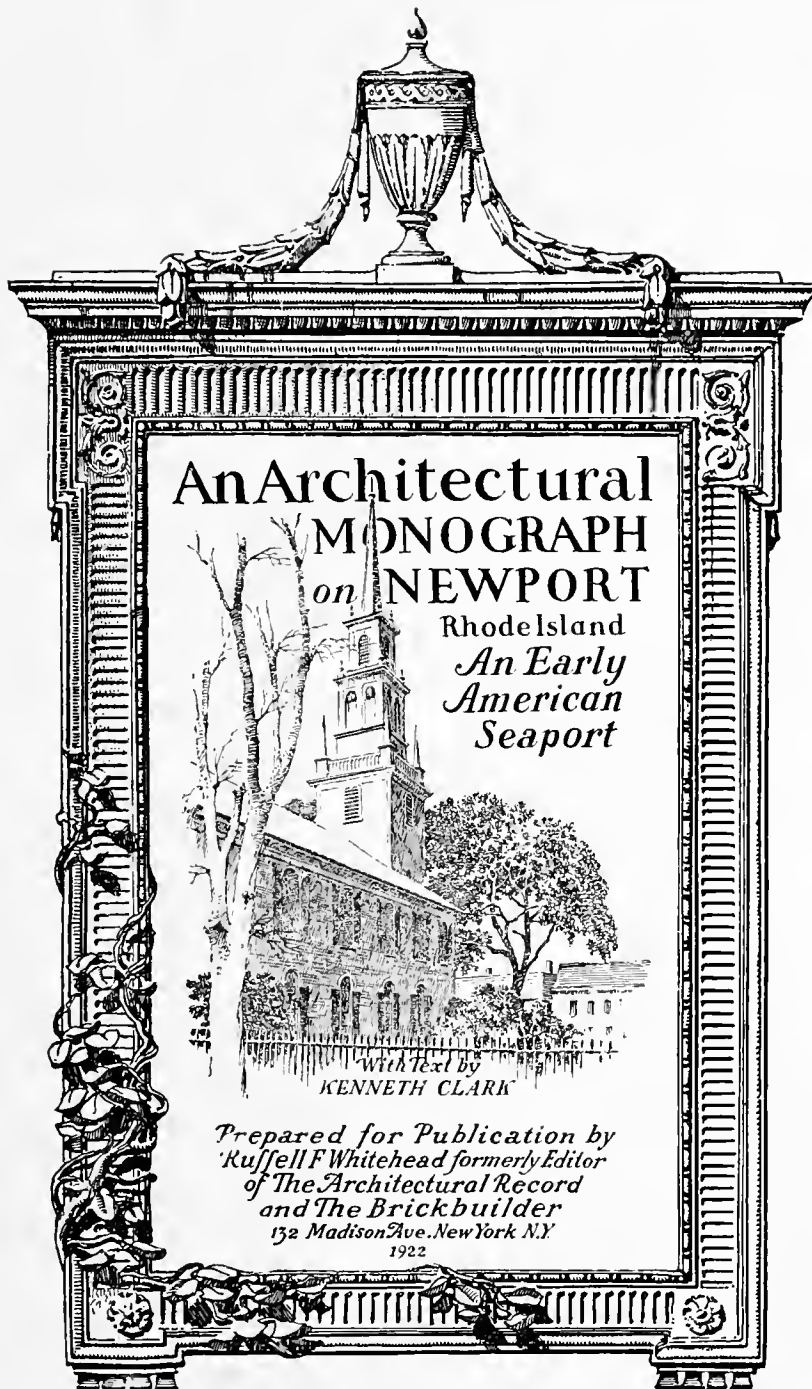
The
WHITE PINE
SERIES OF
Architectural Monographs
Volume VIII *Number 3*

NEWPORT
Rhode Island
An Early American
Seaport

With Introductory Text by
Kenneth Clark

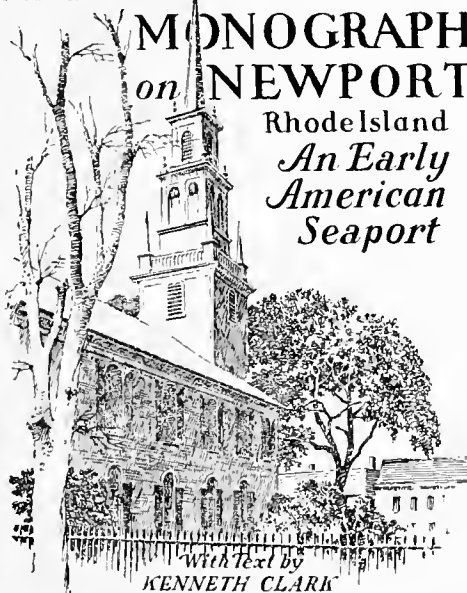
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An Architectural
MONOGRAPH
on NEWPORT

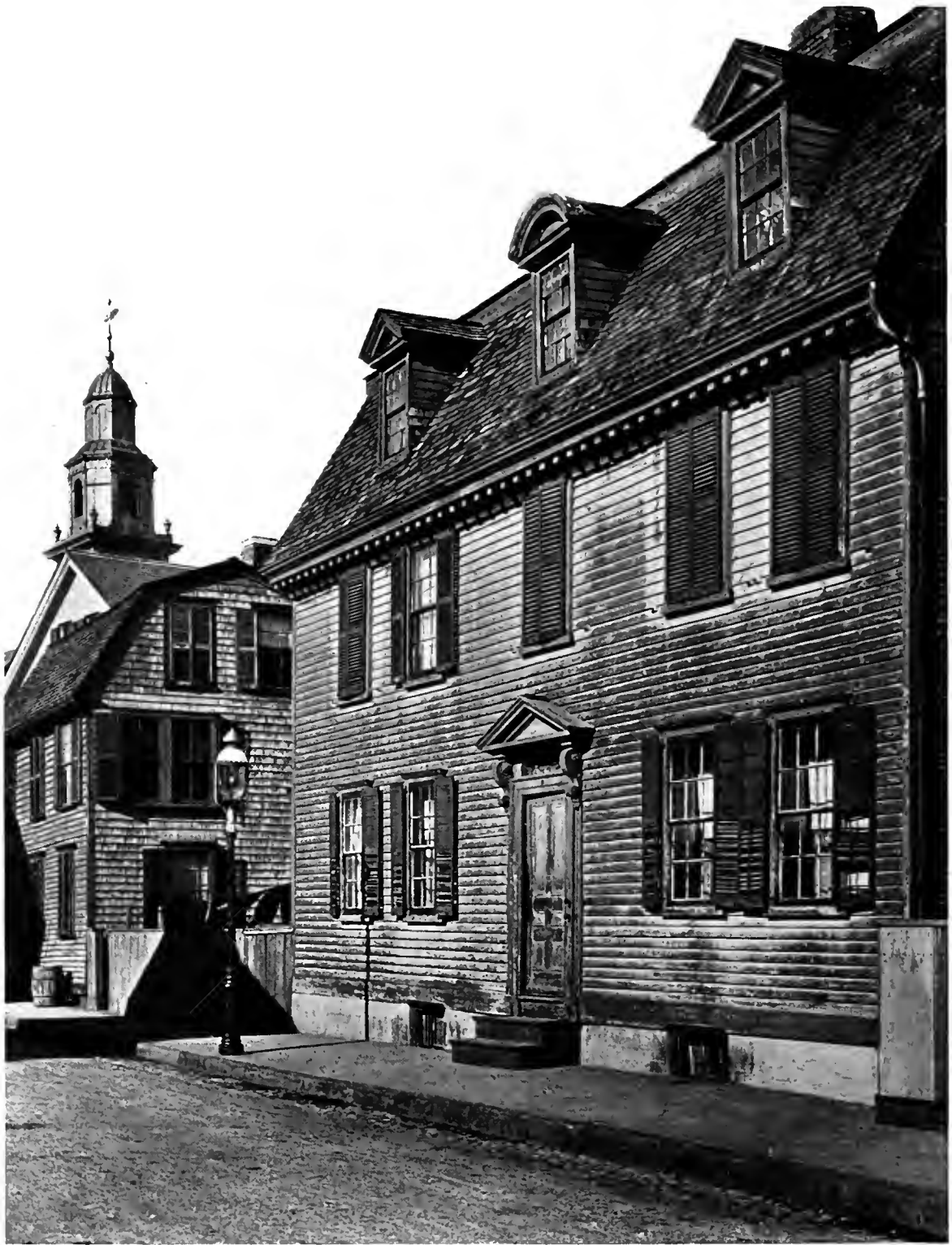
Rhodelsland
*An Early
American
Seaport*



With text by
KENNETH CLARK

*Prepared for Publication by
Russell F Whitehead formerly Editor
of The Architectural Record
and The Brickbuilder
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1922



DUKE STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.
House at Number 5 in the foreground.

The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

Vol. VIII

JUNE, 1922

No. 3

NEWPORT AN EARLY AMERICAN SEAPORT

By KENNETH CLARK

It may not come as a surprise to our readers to know that Mr. Clark is not only the official photographer for THE WHITE PINE MONOGRAPH SERIES, but that he is also an architect. To his appreciation of architectural composition and to his understanding of mouldings and their light values, may be attributed much of his unquestioned success in architectural photography.—EDITOR'S NOTE.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY THE AUTHOR

TO most people Newport means nothing more than the summer playground of the very rich and socially prominent. The mere mention of this Rhode Island watering-place calls up a conglomerate vision of Society, with a capital "S," Bailey's Beach, the Casino, and The Breakers. While it is true that one part of Newport is occupied by the "show places" which have given the town its reputation for smartness and palatial residences, there is another interest for the architect, that to be found in the old town, full of memories and associations of a former and simpler age.

Newport was once America's foremost seaport, far outstripping New York in volume of shipping and commerce. It boasted a line of vessels sailing direct to London, carrying the sperm-oil, candles, woolen goods, and farm produce which the colony exported, as well as the more prosperous citizens as passengers.

The old town lies along the harbor and originally consisted of two streets, Thames Street and Spring Street, paralleling the shore-line and terminating in the parade now known as Washington Square. The town was originally settled by Nicholas Easton and his two sons, who, coming from the Massachusetts Bay Colony, landed May 2, 1639. Other colonists soon joined them, a town was laid out, and a new American commonwealth was begun.

For more than a hundred years the town prospered in peace and plenty, until the mutterings of rebellion were heard, and in 1769, six years before the battle of Lexington, there

occurred here the first act of open rebellion against the mother country. The British ship *Liberty* was seized and scuttled as an act of revenge for outrages perpetrated upon the population by her officers and crew. In 1772 another outbreak occurred, when some townsmen, in retaliation for British oppression, put out in boats and attacked the King's ship *Gaspé*, burned her, and severely wounded her commander. This attack resulted in the first bloodshed in the American war for liberty, and was the first armed resistance to the British navy by the Colonies. After the outbreak of the Revolution the sturdy seafarers of the town furnished four thousand men to help man the ships of the new American navy, and from the battle of Lexington to the surrender at Yorktown the men of Newport played a prominent part in all branches of the service. Washington complained that, owing to their hot-headed zeal, the Rhode Island troops gave him more trouble than any others, to which their commander, Colonel Olney, replied, "That is what the enemy says."

In 1776 a British fleet arrived before the town and landed one thousand men, who were quartered in the houses of the citizens. General Prescott was assigned to the command, and he made an imperishable name for himself as a bully and tyrant. His headquarters were the house at the corner of Spring and Pelham streets, which is still standing, unaltered. This unpopular officer was captured during a period of revelry by a detachment of Continentals under Colonel William Barton. The British forces

evacuated Newport on October 25, 1779, after a carnival of destruction that left the town almost in ruins. The occupation by the French forces, under the Comte de Rochambeau, occurred shortly after, and they were gladly welcomed by the long-suffering townspeople.

In the narrow, quaint streets of the town along the waterfront there remain many houses of the Revolutionary and pre-Revolutionary period, some sadly in need of repair, and many mutilated beyond restoration. Unfortunately modern Newport does not seem to regard with proper reverence these souvenirs of her greater days, and with a few exceptions



Window Detail.
OLD COMMUNITY HOUSE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

they are fast going to rack and ruin; many of them have been altered for commercial use, and others, fine mansions of a former day, now house foreign laborers, and are little more than tenements.

Many fine houses, however, remain, and few sections of New England can boast of better individual examples. The general impression of architectural type that is gained in the course of a walk about the streets is one of smallness of scale and refinement of detail, essentially domestic in feeling and character. Many of the doorways are rich in a peculiarly naïve ornamental treatment, with Corinthian caps that never graced



WANTON-LYMAN-HAZARD HOUSE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.



THE OLD BULL MANSION, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

the pages of Vignola or Buhlmann, but are nevertheless beautiful in their expression of the work of the master craftsman of that day, who, perhaps deficient in knowledge of the pure classic detail that the work of the Massachusetts coast boasts, has, however, evolved a somewhat primitive expression of it that abounds in originality and is well worth study.

The architecture of our old coast towns, Newburyport, Salem, Marblehead, Portsmouth, and Newport, all these and others, built and lived in by seafarers, seem to bear the mark of a culture that is not easily accounted for, except as the expression of an innate refinement, broadened by contact with the Old World. In the Massachusetts towns the detail is more refined and seemingly more intimately related to that of the mother country than it is in Newport.

Classic tradition was more accurately followed in Massachusetts, but the craftsmen and designers, though their knowledge of their elements was more manifest, showed no superiority in the actual execution than did those of Newport. There is a certain quality about some of the Newport work that is hard to classify, yet which adds an interest that the more conventional work lacks.

Perhaps the most conventional house in Newport, and one of the best preserved, is the Vernon house, at the corner of Clark

and Mary Streets. It is in excellent condition and remains as it was in pre-Revolutionary days. It was built in 1758 by one Metcalf Bowler, and in 1773 it came into the possession of William Vernon, a wealthy merchant and ship-owner, and remained in the family until 1872. This



THE JOHN BANNISTER HOUSE, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

house was occupied by the Comte de Rochambeau during his stay here as commandant of the allied forces in 1780. During this period many brilliant fêtes and balls were given by the Comte in honor of distinguished visitors and townspeople. Here the victorious General

throughout, and questionable as this treatment may be for wood, from the standpoint of theoretical design it seems well excused in this instance, for the house is a very perfect example of its kind, and the rustication is carefully studied in its relation to the openings and to the



Detail of Doorway.

THE JOHN BANNISTER HOUSE (PRESCOTT HEADQUARTERS),
NEWFORT, RHODE ISLAND.

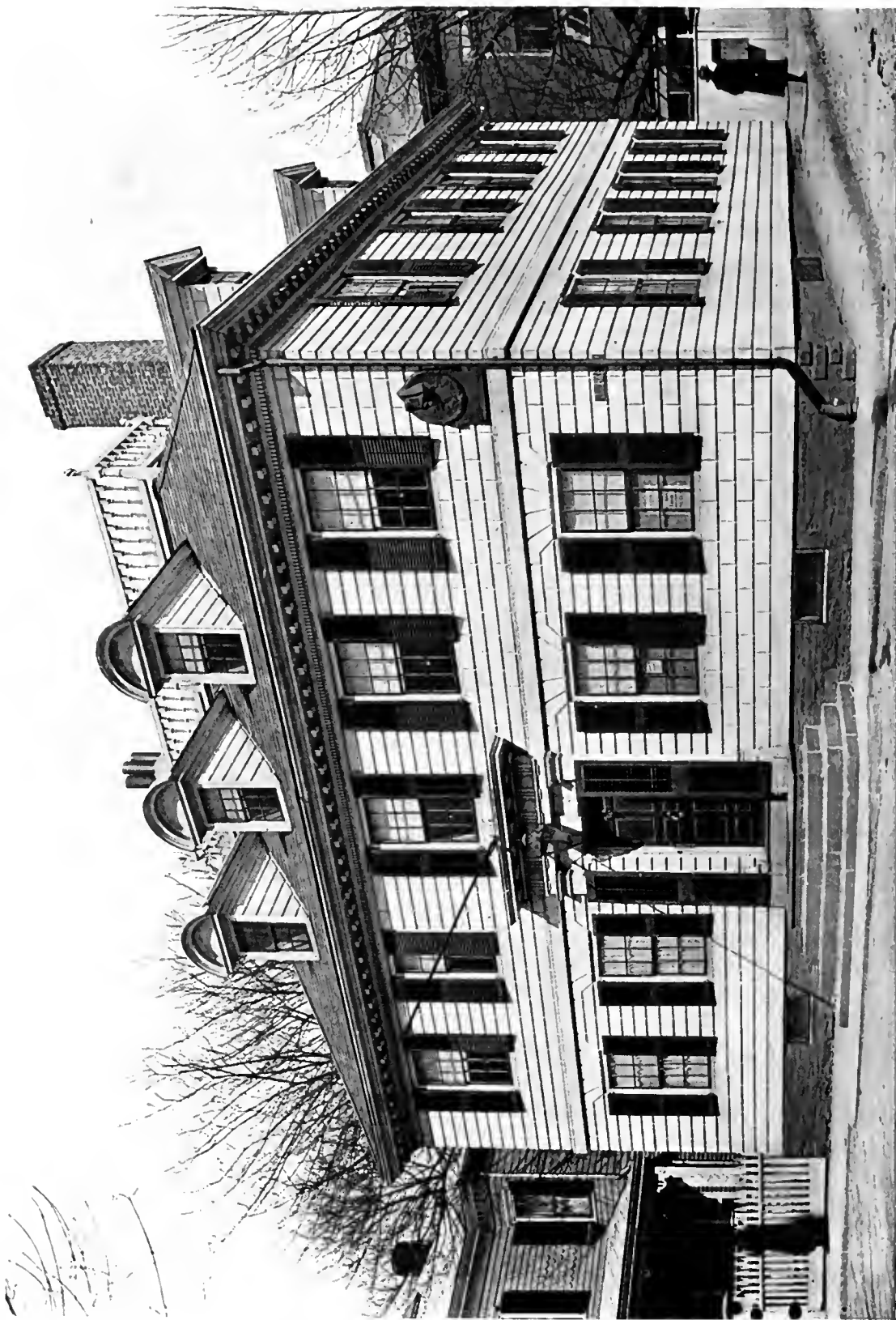
Washington was welcomed on March 8, 1782. The story of eye-witnesses says that he wore the insignia of a Maréchal of France, and was received with all the pomp and display of a royal visitation.

The walls of the Vernon house are rusticated

scale of the façades. The details of the front door and cornice are pure Georgian, well executed, and the fenestration is particularly happy. The rear elevation is as interesting as the front, with its low door under the stair-landing and the finely proportioned arched



THE VERNON HOUSE (ROCHAMBEAU HEADQUARTERS), NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND. General view of the rear.



THE VERNON HOUSE (ROCHAMBEAU HEADQUARTERS), NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.



HOUSE AT NUMBER 228 SPRING STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

window, looking out to a space where there was formerly a garden. Though of less magnificent proportions, this house seems well worth ranking with the "great" houses of similar type of Marblehead and Newburyport.

The Wanton-Lyman-Hazard house, at the corner of Broadway and Stone Street, is one of Newport's earliest examples that remains in anything like its original condition. Local tradition dates this house "before 1700," and



DETAIL OF DOORWAY—NUMBER 27 CHURCH STREET.

the primitive traming showing in the interior of the attic story seems to substantiate this claim, as does the coved plaster cornice of the façade, a treatment which is most unusual and of which there are few remaining examples.

Sadly enough, this Newport house is doomed to destruction, for, standing as it does on a very valuable corner lot on Broadway, it will soon have to surrender to commercial necessity and go the way so large



DETAIL OF DOORWAY—NUMBER 228 SPRING STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.



HOUSE AT NUMBER 36 CHURCH STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

Revival, which ran its course with such dire results in the early nineteenth century. The monitor treatment in this example is very well done, and it seems strange that this feature is not used more in modern work, giving as it does a practically full third story without adding to the height of the façade; it would seem to solve the dormer problem in a most satisfactory way.

At 228 Spring Street, on the corner of Leovin Street, there stands a fine type of Newport house. It still retains a front yard which was formerly much larger, but the encroachments of commerce have reduced it to its present dimensions. The elevation facing Spring Street has many fine qualities: the window spacing is excellent and the corner-boards, with their

a number of its contemporaries have gone.

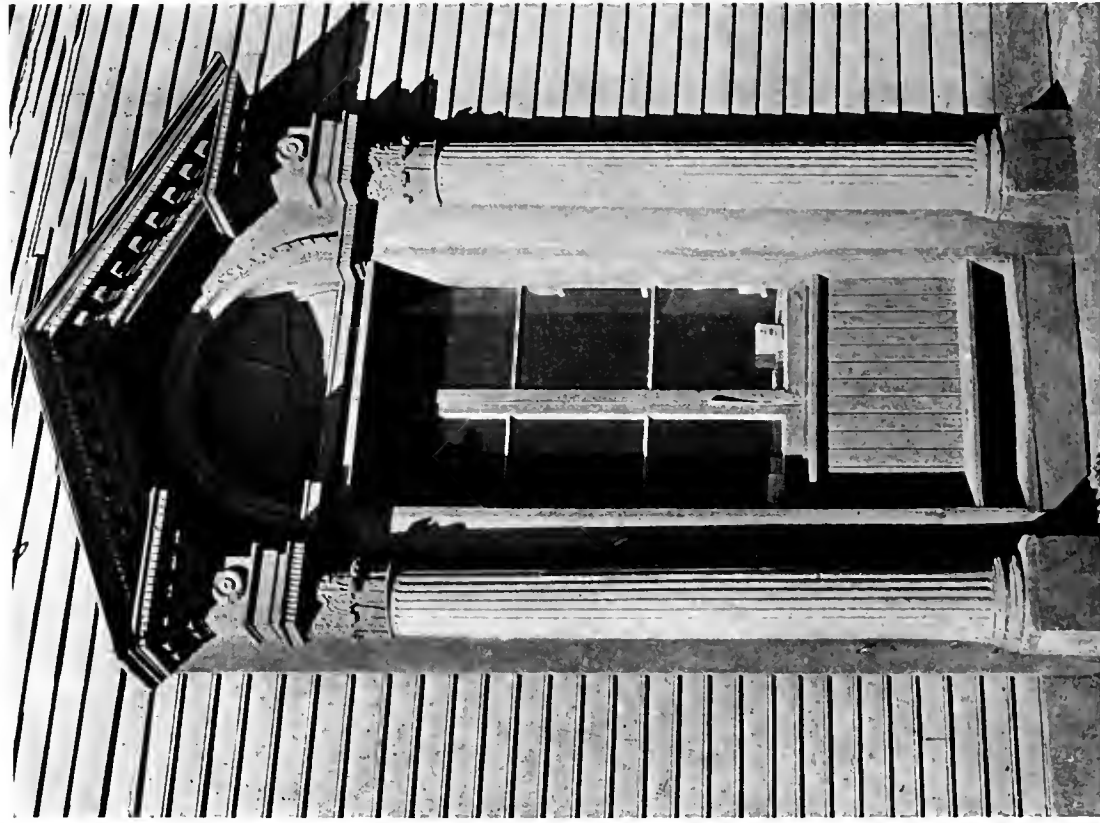
The old Bull mansion, situated at the "First Mile Stone," on Broadway, is a fine foursquare manor-house of the 1750 period. Its walls are rusticated, and a beautifully proportioned roof with an embryo "monitor" break in it has much character. The addition of a porch, of much later date than the house, has ruined the general effect, but an idea can be obtained from the end elevation of its appearance before the porch was added. The roof is odd in that it has both dormers and a monitor break in which there are no windows. Judging from its detail the roof construction is of the same date as the main house.

There are several houses here with full monitor roofs, of the typical Rhode Island type so familiar in Providence and Bristol. The house at 115 Pelham Street is one of the best of these, but of a later date, and shows in the details the beginnings of the influence of the Greek

simple, sunk panel, form a fine termination to the horizontal lines of the clapboarding, and add a semblance of strength at the corners that has a



HOUSE AT NUMBER 27 CHURCH STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

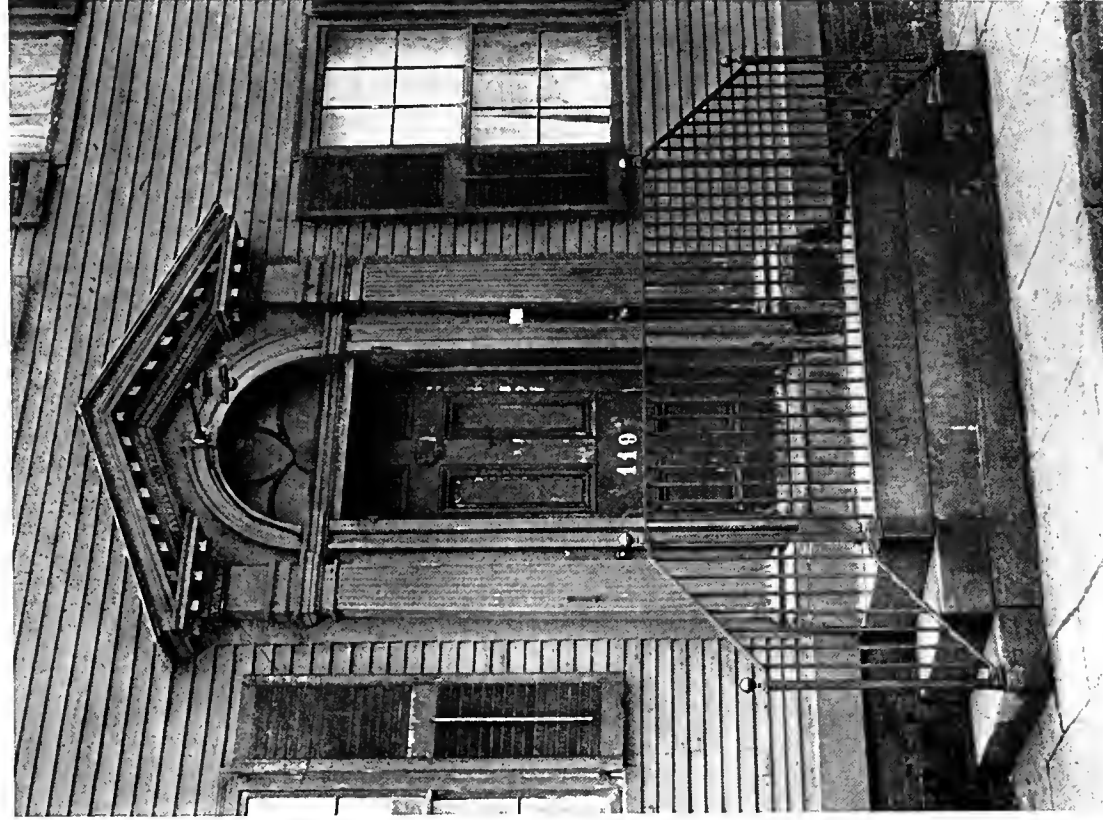


THE MASON HOUSE.

TWO DOORWAYS IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.



NUMBER 5 DUKE STREET.



NUMBER 119 SPRING STREET.



ST. JOSEPH'S SCHOOL.
TWO DOORWAYS IN NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.



HOUSE AT NUMBER 228 SPRING STREET, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.
Detail of Doorway.

satisfying effect. The entrance is most interesting; a decided originality shows in the use and execution of the details. The pediment, slightly too low for ideal proportions, is embellished with rosettes and modillions on its soffit, and the peculiar abacus of the Corinthian cap, with its flowing curves in plan, is unique. It will be noted that the moldings of the abacus carry across the door lintel and form a tie between the two columns, which otherwise would look rather loose and unconnected. The clapboarding is uniformly spaced through the whole height of the façade and its edge is molded. There are

fascia of the cornice has been denticulated and the faces of the modillions bear a panel with a rosette. The soffit has a strap ornament of interlaced pattern, instead of rosettes, which looks more finished. The house itself is well proportioned with a simple ridge roof. An interesting detail is the method by which the cornice has been made and its relation to the upper part of the corner-board, and the moldings over the second-story window heads.

The John Bannister house (now called "The Prescott," because it was once the headquarters of General Prescott), at the corner of Pelham



WHITEHORSE TAVERN, NEWPORT, RHODE ISLAND.

evidently two levels on the ground floor, for the windows of the side street elevation are stepped up with the grade of the street, which is considerable.

It is interesting to compare the doorway of the house at 228 Spring Street with that of the house at 27 Church Street, which is somewhat similar in general design but totally different in detail. The capitals in the latter are of Doric-Corinthian combination that has almost the character of an Adam detail, and the proportion of the entablature and its component parts is much better, more refined, and in accordance with accepted proportions; but even here the originality of the craftsman has made itself evident, for the

and Spring streets, has a gambrel roof of rather fine proportions, with three well designed dormers. The recessed entrance motive is a feature rare in Newport, and its treatment here with colonnettes and elliptically arched head is well thought out. The moldings of the cornice supporting the soffit are beautifully profiled, and form an interesting contrast to the stubby crown molding with its narrow fascia just above it.

At 5 Duke Street is a fine doorway with excellent detail; brackets, beautifully designed, supporting a pedimented door-head. This is the only example of this type in Newport, and seems to bear the mark of a more sophisticated hand than the average work.

There are other examples in Newport worthy of detailed description, but to do this would unduly prolong the text, and is unnecessary, for many of them are illustrated herein.

The old houses of Newport, because of their location in the heart of the business section, are being menaced; in all probability they will

soon be torn down or unrecognizably altered. Architecturally speaking, old Newport is too little known, and this photographic record of its early achievement should be a valuable contribution to the history of early American domestic architecture.

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